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ABSTRACT

Presented in this paper are the results of interviews undertaken in 1977 to determine who supported a new statewide minimum standards bill in New Jersey and why. The views of forty individuals who were selected on the basis of their active involvement in the statewide minimum standards issue, are summarized in statements following each of twelve questions that were asked during the interviews. Questions centered around the process and the reasons by which the law on minimum standards was advocated or opposed. Some of the issues dealt with include: accountability and performance for schools; local control; urban and minority groups; national trends; basic skills; public attitudes; testing; parental involvement; teacher and administrator responsibility; and financial support. The interview protocols are appended. (Author/EE)

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STATEWIDE MINIMUM PUPIL PROFICIENCY STANDARDS IN NEW JERSEY: INTERVIEWS WITH LEADING FIGURES

(A Study Done Under NIE Grant C-76-0105)

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Introduction

In January 1972 a case was brought in the Superior Court of Hudson County of the State of New Jersey, challenging the system of financing the public schools of the state. By April 1973 the Robinson v. Cahill case had worked its way to the New Jersey Supreme Court, and the Court ruled for the plaintiffs on the basis that the school finance system denied equal educational opportunity to the public school pupils of New Jersey and violated the state's constitutional guarantee of a "thorough and efficient" education for all pupils between five and eighteen years of age. In its ruling, the Supreme Court directed the State Legislature to enact a new public education law that could meet constitutional muster. After much wrangling and extended deadlines by which the Legislature was to meet the judicial directive, a new education law was eventually enacted. The Court decreed the law to be facially constitutional contingent upon legislative appropriation of the funds necessary to implement the law. For another half year a debate raged over the best tax system by which to raise the needed revenue. The Court finally found it necessary to prod the Legislature dramatically by ordering that the public schools of New Jersey be closed until such time as the new education law was funded. The shutdown lasted only a few days and got the desired result - a new tax system by which to finance the new education law.

While the tax debate was taking place, the State Board of Education addressed another issue raised by the new education law. The law called for standards of pupil performance. "The state board, after consultation with the commissioner and review by the Joint Committee on the Public Schools shall (a) establish goals and standards which shall be applicable to all public schools in the state..."[1] This could be interpreted to mean statewide standards or locally determined standards. The State Board was confused and divided over the form which state standards should take. Some Board members wanted statewide minimum pupil proficiency standards which would be annually assessed by a state testing program. Others wanted the state standards to be of a rhetorical and inspirational nature, with each local district being allowed to operationalize the definition in the way it saw fit. A compromise was worked out to the effect that there would be locally determined standards to trigger remediation but also a Board-appointed Task Force comprised of representatives from New Jersey's education and business communities to explore the desirability of statewide standards and make recommendations to the Board. The Task

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[1] N.J.S.A. 18A:7A-6.

Force was still trying to make up its collective mind when the Legislature went ahead and adopted a law calling for statewide minimum standards as part of the new education system. The new education law, as amended by the state standards act, reads as follows:

> 18A:7A-6
> The State Board, after consultation with the commissioner and review by the Joint Committee on the Public Schools, shall (a) establish goals and standards which shall be applicable to all public schools in the State, including uniform Statewide standards of pupil proficiency in basic communications and computational skills at appropriate points in the educational careers of the pupils of the State, which standards of proficiency shall be reasonably related to those levels of proficiency ultimately necessary as part of the preparations of individuals to function politically, economically and socially in a democratic society and which shall be consistent with the goals and guidelines established pursuant to sections 4 and 5 of this act, and (b) make rules concerning procedures for the establishment of particular educational goals, objectives and standards by local boards of education.
>
> 18A:7A-7
> Each local board of education shall establish particular educational goals, objectives and standards pursuant to rules prescribed by the State board. In each district in which there are pupils whose proficiency in basic communications and computational skills is below the Statewide standard, the local board annually shall establish an interim goal designed to assure reasonable progress toward the goal of achievement by each such pupil of at least the Statewide standard of proficiency. Each such district, as part of its annual educational plan, shall develop a basic skills improvement plan for progress toward such interim goal. Any such improvement plan shall be approved by the commissioner, and may include (a) curricular changes; (b) in-service training programs for teachers; (c) diagnostic, remedial, or skill-maintenance programs for pupils; (d) consultations with parents or guardians; (e) any other measure designed to promote progress toward such interim goal. Each year each district shall evaluate pupil proficiency in basic communications and computational skills, and determine its relation to, and progress toward Statewide and any interim goals concerning pupil proficiency in such skills. Such evaluation may be based in part on annual testing and in part on such other means as the board deems proper to determine pupil status and needs, ensure pupil progress, and assess the degree to which the goals have been achieved.

The interviews undertaken in this study were for the purpose of learning who supported the statewide minimum standards bill and why.

Procedure

Forty people were interviewed during the spring, summer and fall of 1977. The interviewees were selected on the basis of their active involvement in the statewide minimum standards issue. Some names were added to the original list of interviewees as we progressed, and other names were omitted when it became obvious that the organizations which they represented had already had several spokespersons interviewed whose answers did not deviate from each other in any significant respect. The interviewees were from the following organizations: the New Jersey Legislature; the New Jersey State Board of Education; the New Jersey State Department of Education; the New Jersey State Department of Higher Education; the Cherry Hill Public Schools; the Jersey City Public Schools; the Rutgers University Graduate School of Education; Passaic County College; the New Jersey Education Association; the New Jersey Association of School Administrators; the New Jersey School Boards Association; the Education Law Center in Newark; the New Jersey Education Reform Project of the Greater Newark Urban Coalition; the New Jersey Taxpayers Association; the New Jersey Business and Industry Association; the Puerto Rican Congress; the Newark Star Ledger; and the Upward Bound directors in New Jersey.

The interview protocols are contained in the Appendix. These were prepared by the NIE Project staff and submitted to the following people for review and recommendation: Robert Feldmesser of Educational Testing Service; Wayne Hoy of Rutgers University Graduate School of Education; Dale Mann of Columbia University Teachers College. After incorporating the recommendations of the reviewers, we produced the interview protocols in final form. The protocols indicate that the respondents were guaranteed confidentiality, and responses will not be identified by individuals in this report.

The duration of the interviews was from a half hour to two hours, depending on the interviewee's available time and the intensity of his or her feelings toward the issue of statewide minimum pupil proficiency standards. None of the interviews was tape recorded; however, whenever possible an interview was conducted by at least two interviewers. This was the case for twenty-four of the forty interviews, with the remaining sixteen interviews conducted by a single person. The author of this report was present at thirty-three of the interviews. Whenever time permitted, a set of the interview protocols was mailed to the interviewee in advance of the interview. This occurred in most instances.

Results

The results of the interviews are presented here in the order that the questions were asked.

QUESTION 1: STATEWIDE MINIMUM STANDARDS HAS BEEN AN ISSUE IN NEW JERSEY FOR MORE THAN A YEAR. WOULD YOU CLASSIFY YOURSELF AS A CONSISTENT ADVOCATE OR OPPONENT OF MINIMUM STANDARDS OR HAVE YOUR VIEWS CHANGED DURING THIS PERIOD?

The responses to this question indicated a difficulty in the wording of the question. Some respondents could recall whether they had been consistently for of against statewide minimum standards, but for most of the respondents the word "consistent" should have been replaced with the word "cautious". This majority of the respondents expressed concern for the wisdom of their position, regardless of the side they came down on, and intimated a willingness to withdraw from that position should events show it to be no longer tenable. Some respondents had obviously been on each side of the issue several times in their own minds, and while they had settled on one side by the time of the interview, they were remarkably sympathetic to the arguments that could be brought against their position. They still were not sure whether statewide minimum standards would do more harm or good.

Supporters

The most significant result from this question is in the breakdown by organization of the supporters and opponents of statewide minimum standards. The supporters are comprised of a coalition of conservatives, business groups, and urban and minority groups. The legislative bill calling for statewide minimum standards was introduced by a moderate Republican member of the State Assembly. The support for the bill was at least as strong among the conservative members of the Legislature as among the liberals, regardless of political party affiliation.

Among special interest groups supporting the bill were the New Jersey Education Reform Project of the Greater Newark Urban Coalition, which is funded by both the Carnegie and Ford Foundations; the Puerto Rican Congress, funded with federal education monies; the Education Law Center in Newark, a Ford Foundation funded operation whose focus has been on urban education reform; the New Jersey Business and Industry Association; and the Upward Bound directors in New Jersey. Leaders of the New Jersey Taxpayers Association also supported the concept of statewide minimum standards, although no organizational position was adopted and no lobbying for the legislative bill was conducted.

The conservatives who support statewide minimum standards do so primarily from a

desire for greater accountability and performance from the schools. They want the public to get a fair return on the money it invests in the schools. Moreover, they want future generations who will be well enough educated to be economically productive.

The Upward Bound directors were especially sensitive to the fact that kids were getting inflated grades in high school, only to later be crushed in college. The urban and minority groups who support statewide minimum standards hope that such standards will spotlight the problems of city schools and generate more state aid for the schools. The concern is not so much for a return on the dollar or the development of economic producers as for equalizing the opportunities of poor kids with those of more fortunate kids. Thus, the urban and minority groups see statewide minimum standards as a necessary first step in the development of programs which will remediate the deficiencies of low achieving children. They want to compel urban teachers and administrators to raise their expectancy levels to a statewide minimum and to explain why children are not reaching that minimum.

A group which lobbied forcefully for adoption of statewide minimum standards and which does not fall on either the conservative or the urban/minority end of the political spectrum is the New Jersey School Boards Association. The headquarters staff of this group formulated a position in support of statewide minimum standards which they were later able to persuade the membership to endorse. The headquarters staff were themselves influenced by the Urban School Boards Committee of the NJSBA. The reasons given for their support of statewide minimum standards echoed the urban/minority position much more than the conservative position. Because it is representative of local school boards, the New Jersey School Boards Association was expected to be the organization which most voiced the local control argument against state standards. When this did not happen, the local control forces lost their most logical advocate. The School Boards Association made it clear, however, that their support for statewide minimum standards was contingent upon an increase in state aid to local districts to allow districts with low property tax wealth the revenue with which to meet the state standards.

Finally among the supporters of statewide minimum standards, it should be noted that the dean of the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers - the State University of New Jersey - gave legislative testimony in favor of such standards. He is an urban advocate of some years standing.

Opponents

Whereas the active supporters of statewide minimum standards were almost exclusively laypeople, the active opponents were almost exclusively professional

educators. The State Education Commissioner testified against the adoption of statewide standards, and so did other members of the State Education Department. No member of the Department testified in support of the statewide standards. The State Board of Education was generally opposed to the legislation in its original form, but it did acquiesce in the revision which permitted locally determined interim goals en route to the state minimum. Prior to this revision, the Board had been split three ways, with three members for state standards, two opposed, and the remaining four members unsure. The most powerful teacher organization in the state, the New Jersey Education Association, opposes statewide minimum standards, as does its smaller counterpart, the American Federation of Teachers. The New Jersey Association of School Administrators also opposes the state standards. What all this means is that those responsible for implementing the law are the ones who worked to prevent its passage. The State Education Department has adopted the position that it will do its duty under the law. The New Jersey Education Association continues its attack on the wisdom of the law.

The opposition of the education establishment to statewide minimum standards derives from several concerns. There is a concern for preserving local control and on-the-scene expertise from bureaucratic entaglements and remote decisionmakers. As two of the respondents put it independently of each other, state control means statewide mistakes whereas local control also localizes disaster.

There is a concern among the opponents that schools not be leveled down to a statewide minimum. Lighthouse districts should not be denied the resources to maintain their inspirational function, nor should gifted pupils be sacrificed on behalf of weak pupils.

There is a concern that a statewide minimum will result in invidious comparisons among school districts. The comparisons could redound to the detriment rather than the benefit of urban districts if the Legislature chooses to punish districts for poor performance. Furthermore, children who do poorly on the state tests will be stigmatized, and the urban and minority groups who do poorly will suffer stigmatization beyond that which they already endure. One opponent of state standards expressed the belief that urban and minority kids are being victimized by the Carnegie and Ford Foundations, which support basic skills as a way of meeting the society's manpower needs. The result is that the poor are forced to pay "cognitive dues" to get the decent treatment to which they are already entitled as human beings, and when they fail to pay these dues through adequate test performance they are humiliated and cast off.

There is a very strong concern that teachers will become the scapegoats for

failures more properly attributed to society at large. One of the officials of the New Jersey Education Association told the interviewers of the route he takes through Trenton on his way to work. He passes through decaying streets where the pathology of poverty is all about. There are winos, prostitutes, the idle unemployed, menacing adolescents. He wondered how a child growing up in this area could ever do well in school and whether the conditions in which the child lives were created by teachers.

Finally, the concern was expressed that the decision regarding statewide minimum standards should not have been made by the Legislature because this violated the historic autonomy which the State Board of Education has enjoyed from the Legislature. To have legislative management of education entails a reductionism of issues to terms the Legislature can understand. It also means that decisions will be made in the cockpit of public controversy, hardly the most deliberative forum.

Imputed Motives

Naturally, the supporters and opponents of statewide minimum standards each present their motives as noble. Each side also imputes to the other motives of a baser sort. The conservative supporters of statewide minimum standards are accused of an attempt to embarrass and discredit their urban allies. The conservatives really want to show that urban school districts are in too sorry a condition to justify further state expenditures on those districts. (While no conservative supporter of state standards said these things during the formal interviews, one had made these kinds of remarks off the record to the researcher about a year earlier.) The conservatives are trying to build a case for tax reduction. They do not wish to help academically weak urban pupils but want to put them in a position where they will drop out of school.

As for the urban/minority members of this strange alliance, it is claimed that they are trying to get more money with which to line their own pockets and cover up the financial mismanagement of the cities. The contention is that the urban schools have not lacked the money with which to do the job, but that they have not spent the money wisely and have kept too many nonproductive people on the payroll.

As for the opponents of statewide minimum standards, they are alleged to be practicing the protectionism of the professional class. The opponents, it is said, wish only to be accountable to themselves. Furthermore, teachers do not want to take responsibility for the performance of their pupils. The opponents are also said to oppose a redistribution of public school monies from the suburban districts, in which most of them are comfortably nested both as residents and public employees,

to the urban districts where the most serious problems are. The State Education Department is accused of trying to duck its constitutional responsibility for the state's education system, and the Commissioner is chided for his fear of antagonizing the politically powerful New Jersey Education Association, a group who are widely credited as having deposed the previous Commissioner.

QUESTION 2: BY WHAT GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS WERE YOU ADVISED IN THE FORMULATION OF YOUR OPINION ON THIS ISSUE?

The group most frequently mentioned by the supporters of statewide minimum standards as having influenced their position was the New Jersey Education Reform Project. Credit is given particularly to Lawrence Rubin, the research director of NJERP, and the position papers he developed. No other group or individual was mentioned with a high frequency, although many groups and individuals were mentioned once or twice.

Those who oppose statewide minimum standards appear to have been most influenced by discussions within their own organizations. In one respect this is not too surprising, since the opponents are from professional education organizations which are experienced at formulating positions on broad educational issues. It does raise the question, however, of the extent to which the professionals were prepared to hear and heed the sentiments of the lay community. There is also a question of whether some professional organizations adopted an upcompromising position before the lay groups had formulated their positions.

One of the opponents of statewide minimum standards said that the people who advised him were John Dewey, Alfred North Whitehead, Harry Broudy, Maxine Green and others who have thought seriously about education. He went on to echo a criticism which most of the opponents of statewide minimum standards brought against the supporters: that the supporters were too untutored in educational matters to realize the complexity of the standards issue or the long-term disaster they were visiting upon the state.

The group which appears to have been systematically exposed to the broadest range of opinion was the Joint Education Committee of the State Legislature because of the testimony it received in its public hearings.

Some of the higher officials in the State Education Department had the benefit of discussions with their counterparts in other states. The Department had also appointed a Task Force comprised of representatives from diverse interest groups to make recommendations regarding the desirability and feasibility of statewide minimum standards. The groups which were represented on the Task Force were school administrators and teachers, college teachers and administrators, businessmen, minority

group organization spokespersons, professional education organization leaders. The Task Force was still investigating the issues when the Legislature passed the law requiring statewide minimum standards.

QUESTION 3: IF YOUR VIEWS CHANGED DURING THIS PERIOD WHICH GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS WERE MOST INFLUENTIAL IN CHANGING YOUR VIEWS? HOW AND WHY?

Since most of the respondents characterized themselves as consistent but cautious advocates of their positions, this question was not applicable to them. However, some volunteered that, as time passes, they are finding more reasons for sticking to the position they have adopted. One of the state legislators said that he became strengthened in his support of statewide minimum standards when he saw that the State Education Department and the New Jersey Education Association both opposed such standards. He considers both groups to be self-serving at the expense of the public.

Two of the people who changed from opposition to cautious support were influenced by the hard data of test results. In one case the person was familiar with the test score declines that showed up in studies conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. In the other case, the person saw the most recent results of the New Jersey Educational Assessment program, a forerunner of the minimum basic skills testing program, and noted the drastic decline in scores as one got to the poorest end of the socioeconomic continuum.

QUESTION 4: WHAT STEPS DID YOU OR YOUR ORGANIZATION TAKE TO FACILITATE (PREVENT) THE PASSAGE OF THE MINIMUM STANDARDS LAW?

Testimony before the Joint Education Committee of the State Legislature was the most frequent response to this question. The organization which was most mobilized to go beyond this effort was the New Jersey Education Association. The NJEA has legislative committees in each county which dealt directly with the legislators from those counties. The NJEA urged a massive letter writing campaign. NJEA officials made presentations at public meetings. The NJEA could also proselytize through the professionally produced periodical literature that goes to all its members and other interested persons. In addition, the NJEA has the machinery to develop and distribute eye-catching flyers and brochures on specific issues as they arise. Finally, if the minimum standards law or its implementation creates a constitutional issue, the NJEA has the resources with which to pursue this issue through courts. A few years ago, the NJEA carried litigation on the matter of statewide testing all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court (and lost).

Whereas the NJEA has the resources to propagandize the state, other organizations were limited to enlightening their memberships, giving legislative testimony,

and buttonholing individaul legislators as the opportunity arose. Perhaps the only person whose clout approaches that of the NJEA is Robert Braun, the education editor of the only statewide newspaper, The Newark Star-Ledger. Braun has news columns in the daily issues of the Star-Ledger and an opinion column in the Sunday issue. His detractors say that it is difficult to distinguish between the two kinds of columns. Braun devoted many of his columns to the advocacy of statewide minimum standards. However, Braun does not have an organized constituency on whom he can rely to repeat his messages for him. Nor does he have dollars or votes to corral behind candidates for public office. Given the power of the NJEA to do these things, its defeat on the issue of statewide minimum standards indicates the extent to which the legislators felt they were being swept along by broader social forces than the NJEA. (These forces are dealt with in the response to Question 7.)

The New Jersey Association of School Administrators also has contact people who were asked to meet with legislators on the state standards question. For its own legislative testimony, the NJASA retained William Shine, a school superintendent who is widely known as a former Assistant Commissioner in the State Education Department. In the latter capacity, Shine had developed a process model of educational reform whereby districts were required to follow certain steps designed to provide a thorough and efficient education. The steps in the model were: (1) community goal setting, (2) development of goal indicators, (3) needs assessment, (4) program development and implementation, (5) program evaluation, (6) program/budget revision. This model became the official State Education Department definition of what constituted a "thorough and efficient" education, and was incorporated into the Administrative Code which augments the Public School Education Act. The minimum standards legislation went beyond the process model to an outcomes model.

QUESTION 5: WHAT GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS WERE MOST EFFECTIVE IN ASSISTING YOU IN YOUR EFFORTS?

The organization which is most frequently mentioned as having been effective in the passage of the law is the New Jersey Education Reform Project. Others who get credit are the Education Law Center, whose director, Paul Tractenberg, helped prepare an early draft of the law; the New Jersey School Boards Association; the New Jersey Business and Industry Association; and Robert Braun of The Newark Star-Ledger. The acceptance of the revised version of the bill by the State Board of Education no doubt did much to undercut the opposition of the State Education Department to statewide minimum standards. Of course, final credit goes to the Legislature itself and the bill's sponsor, Assemblyman Thomas Kean.

Those who are credited with doing the most to prevent passage of the bill are

the New Jersey Education Association, the State Education Department, and the New Jersey Association of School Administrators.

It is interesting to note that while the revised version of the bill mollified some people and enlisted their support, it antagonized others who thought of it as a cop-out. The revision allowed local districts to have interim standards and work their way up to the state standards over a period of time (unspecified). This gave local districts some latitude and some time, and it precluded the prospect of imminent large-scale state intervention into local districts. However, it also failed to put a deadline on the tolerance that would be shown toward poor-achieving local districts, or even to specify what poor achievement was.

QUESTION 6: WHAT DID EACH OF THEM DO (TO ASSIST IN THE PASSAGE OR DEFEAT OF THE BILL)?

This question has been covered in the answer to Question 4. None of the respondents added anything to what he or she had said in response to that question.

QUESTION 7: WHAT FACTORS OR FORCES DO YOU THINK ACCOUNT FOR THE PASSAGE OF THE LAW?

Both the supporters and opponents of statewide minimum standards attribute the adoption of the law to broad national trends. There are the hard facts of declining SAT and literacy scores, coupled with recession-pinched taxpayers. The taxpayers want more for their money or at least as much as they think they used to get. In New Jersey, the state increased its share of education costs from 29% to 40% under the new education law. This naturally causes the State Legislature to be more concerned with the effectiveness of the schools.

The skill demands of the economy are increasing at a time when literacy appears to be decreasing. Thus the economy requires more of the schools at the same time that it appears to be getting less in the basic skill areas. The blame is laid to the permissiveness which schools fell into in the Sixties and the frills which schools adopted to accomodate various student interests. Elective courses were created to such an extent that students were able to use these courses to by-pass basic skill courses. A reaction against this looseness has set in, and a return to basic education is a popular demand at this time. Of course, there are many other causes which have been suggested for the apparent decline in basic skills mastery among schoolchildren, such as television, working mothers, and an increasing divorce rate. However, these nonschool factors are not nearly as amenable to social engineering as are the school factors.

There are also the ambivalent attitudes which people hold toward the govern-

ment. On the one hand, they distrust the government and demand accountability mechanisms such as statewide minimum standards. On the other hand, they have a faith that government promulgation means government performance. This second attitude was alluded to in the remarks of one of the respondents who said that the Legislature had cynically given the people a placebo in the form of statewide minimum standards. It was simply the politically expedient thing to do at the time.

A leader in the New Jersey Education Association feels that the minimum standards law is a way of victimizing teachers for their success. Through their collective bargaining efforts, teachers have realized economic gains, which, in turn, have bred public resentment against teachers. The minimum standards law was a way for the public, through its elected representatives, to vent this resentment. The NJEA leader claimed that this public vindictiveness has occurred in every country where teachers have begun to achieve wage parity with kindred workers.

Another respondent felt that the public generally is dissatisfied with a lot of things, but it has easier access to public institutions than to private ones, which in their corporate personhood still claim the right to privacy, and the public institution to which the public has the greatest access is the educational system. Thus, demands for accountability from the institutions which serve the public are more likely to find a target in the public schools than elsewhere. Moreover, the school is an institution with whose operations a large portion of the public is acquainted and about which there is a personal interest.

Some of the factors cited to explain the passage of the minimum standards law were peculiar to New Jersey. Under a ruling by the State Supreme Court, the State Legislature had to devise a new public education law. The Legislature enacted a new law but did not provide funding for the law. The State Supreme Court declared that the law could not be decreed constitutional in the absence of funding and threatened to close down the public schools of New Jersey unless the Legislature came up with the money by a certain date. Eventually the Court was forced to act on its threat, and the state school system was shut down for a few days. Under the pressure, the Legislature adopted an income tax with which to fund the new education law. The income tax meant that revenue would be generated in more affluent communities and distributed to poor communities. In this context, the statewide minimum standards law was viewed as a quid pro quo for the income tax. It was an attempt to assure the suburban taxpayer that his money would not be wasted on urban schools but would produce at least some minimal results.

The governor of New Jersey may have had some effect on the law's passage with his support, although his leadership in support of the income tax had reduced his

popularity to the point of mockery. Members of his administrative team were resigning and publicly disassociating themselves from him.

One of the legislators who was most active on the Joint Education Committee of the State Legislature speculated that recent voter reapportionment in New Jersey might have given the cities the added political input necessary to effect passage of the minimum standards law.

Finally, urban and minority parents had enough confidence in their children's potential to believe that the children could reach and exceed the minimum standards and not be stigmatized as being hopelessly below those standards. They wanted a floor under their children's achievement, which the minimum standards law would lay.

It is interesting to note that when the interviewees were asked to explain their support or opposition regarding statewide minimum standards, they frequently replied in terms of child benefit and helping the poor (or at least keeping the poor from further harm). However, when asked to speculate on the factors which account for the law's enactment, they seldom, and never directly, mentioned these altruistic motives. They may not seriously have had these motives themselves, and therefore doubted that others could. Or perhaps they thought that it went without saying, which makes one wonder why they said it of themselves. It may be a melancholy comment on people's perceptions of our political system that they think their elected officials pass good laws for less than noble reasons. It is as though legislators - politicians - are expected to be pragmatic compromisers, and any bill they pass is a compromise between good and evil intentions, so that the bill, however desirable it may be on its own merits, is alloyed with that modicum of evil that allowed it to be passed in the first place.

QUESTION 8: TO WHAT EXTENT DOES THE LAW MEET YOUR GOALS (OR CONCERNS) REGARDING MINIMUM STANDARDS?

The obvious answer from those who opposed the law and who prefer locally determined minimum standards is that the law does not meet their goals or concerns. The redeeming feature of the law for these people is the provision for locally determined interim goals en route to meeting the state minimum standards. They believe the interim goals will relieve unreasonable pressure from the state standards and allow rational advances. However, it is this part of the law which offends some of the most avid supporters of state standards. They fear that it will serve to delay progress toward the state standard rather than facilitating that progress. To save expense, effort and face, educators at the local level will be content to inch up to the state standards over a protracted period instead of making their

local goals synonymous with state standards. This will be truest for the districts whose pupil test results are farthest below the state minimum standards. Many of these will be urban districts and practically all will be poor districts. Moreover, local educators will have to decide on whether they should go for the multiplier effect of getting a lot of kids above a minimum standard or of realizing significant gains in the scores of individual pupils, especially those who are farthest below the minimum. There is nothing mutually exclusive about the two approaches, but it is a matter of emphasis and perceived public payoff. Thus, the effect of the law in equalizing educational opportunities and outcomes may be vitiated by the trepidation of educators in the very districts which the law was designed to help.

There is also concern from both opponents and supporters of the law that undue emphasis on testing will cause the public to become test fixated and construe education only in terms of testing.

The law is vague on remediation of pupils who fall below standard, and this causes concern among those who hope that the law will prove to be more than window dressing. Educators at the local level worry that the law will raise expectations of them without giving them adequate resources with which to meet the expectations. One person who expressed this concern added that retention in grade should be tied into remediation wherever necessary. He is convinced that social promotion has been a major cause of achievement decline. On the other hand, the law's vagueness is considered a good thing by some officials of the State Education Department. They want the latitude to ease into the implementation carefully and make modifications as experience dictates. They do wish, however, that the Legislature would give them more money to do the job of monitoring local district compliance with Department directives.

One of the law's supporters thinks it would have been better if the Legislature had waited on the report of the Task Force charged with studying the desirability of statewide standards. The report date for the Task Force was not far off when the Legislature acted, and the preemptory haste of the Legislature may be rued later on. When the Task Force was presented with the fait accompli of the Legislature, it shifted its own focus from desirability of state standards to the implementation of them.

Several supporters of the law said simply that it was too early to tell whether the law met their goals or concerns. The law is only a guideline, and a determination of its worth must await the results of implementation. Some of these people are pleased that the law has at least generated some activity in the educational community toward improved instruction.

QUESTION 9: HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE WAY THE LAW IS BEING IMPLEMENTED?

The major complaint regarding the law's implementation, from both opponents and supporters, is the bureaucratic confusion which has resulted. Directives from the State Education Department are unclear and precariously subject to rescission by later directives. There has been a great deal of paperwork, to the point where some local districts claim they have found it necessary to use instructional time and personnel to get the required forms completed and in on schedule. In short, there is concern that the implementation is counterproductive. Rather than conducing to improved instruction, it is an impediment to better teaching.

Related to this concern is the feeling that some districts are being harassed without purpose. "Everyone knows" and test results show that some districts have been doing a good job, if only because of the quality of their pupils. To pester these districts with form filling exercises can only reduce their effectiveness. It also makes additional work for the monitoring agencies - the State Education Department and the county superintendents' offices. It is suggested that these agencies adopt the concentration principle and focus their efforts on the scandalously weak districts. The State Education Department simply does not have the personpower to be closely involved in the operations of some 600 school districts. It has to establish priorities of need, and through the county superintendents and the regional Educational Improvement Centers begin working with the districts that are most desperately in need of help. This will mean that State Education Department personnel in Trenton, in the counties, and at the EICs will have to come out from behind their desks and spend extended periods of time working with teaching staffs in those local districts whose performance results are the lowest in the state. The state officials will have to demonstrate that they can do the job which they are prepared to censure local officials for not doing.

At the time the interviews were conducted - during and immediately after Year One of the state education reform program - there was expressed the sentiment that people should be patient while the State Education Department works out the kinks in the program. Transitional problems are to be expected, and the state should not be pressured into abandoning the program prematurely because of these problems. Indeed, foulups in the implementation, however onerous their immediate effect, provide valuable experience on which to build a better program. Naturally, this sentiment was voiced more often by supporters of the statewide minimum standards law than by opponents. However, the opponents at least refrained from expressing an "I-told-you-so" reaction to the foulups. Whether they will continue to resist this temptation if difficulties are not smoothed over in Year Two remains to be seen.

Something which should be mentioned here, although it was not a finding from the interviews, is the lawsuit brought by the Metropolitan Ecumenical Ministry and the Education Law Center, both located in Newark. According to the Administrative Code, school districts were to be classified by the Commissioner as either approved, conditionally approved, or unapproved, depending on their performance. Local district performance relative to the statewide minimum standards was expected to figure prominently in the classification. If a district is classified as unapproved, a series of steps is invoked, which can culminate in the State Board of Education personally directing the operation of the district. The lawsuit was brought to compel the Commissioner to begin classifying districts. The Commissioner has repeatedly set back the year at which this process will commence. He says he wants districts to have sufficient time to earn an approved rating before subjecting them to the difficulties which will flow from a classification of unapproved. The Commissioner has also questioned whether he is required by the law to classify districts at all. If this "requirement" is only an Administrative Code elaboration on and a reading-into the law, the courts may uphold the Commissioner in eschewing this task altogether. The Commissioner is legally required to <u>evaluate</u> districts, but he may not have to label them. There is, of course, the suspicion that the Commissioner does not wish to add to his implementation problems by entering into the classification process at this time. The State Education Department may not feel that it has the resources to do a better job than the districts which it refuses to approve, and to share in the failure of these districts is to share in their ignominy. At any rate, the litigation is still pending, but the outcome - either way - will be extremely important in terms of the state's response to districts which have high percentages of pupils below the statewide minimum standards.

QUESTION 10: WHAT KINDS OF PROBLEMS DO YOU FORESEE IN THE FUTURE, REGARDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW LAW, FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF CHILDREN, PARENTS, TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS, TAXPAYERS, STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS OR LEGISLATORS?

<u>Children</u>

The problem most predicted for children is that the minimum standards law will result in a very narrow curriculum, an "arid curriculum" as one respondent put it. The "humanizing" parts of the curriculum will be de-emphasized, if not abandoned altogether. This may be a short-term necessity to develop in children the basic skills with which they can later undertake humanistic studies. The danger, of course, is that already capable children may be brought down to the achievement

levels of underdeveloped children through subjection to the same basic curriculum. Children will be taught to pass the state minimum standards tests, and once that obstacle has been hurdled there won't be much time or resources for anything else.

If this is not to happen, and a diversified curriculum is to be continued, then another danger looms. That is the harm inherent in labeling and tracking kids. Can kids be motivated to learn if their self-images have been shattered through labels which are ill-disguised euphemisms for "dumb"? But can those students who are not achieving at minimum standard be maximally assisted without the special attention that effectively segregates and labels them? The urban advocates were more sensitive to this issue than other respondents. However, they did not suggest what should be done with pupils who failed to master the basic curriculum even after remediation efforts. Only one respondent looked ahead to this eventuality, and his recommendation was for vocational tracking.

Regardless of how kids of different ability levels are treated, it is feared that the very existence of test score results will serve to stigmatize groups of low achieving pupils-in the public mind, urban pupils. The self-esteem of these pupils will be lowered still further. This fear was most often expressed by officials of the State Education Department and the New Jersey Education Association, both of which had opposed the statewide minimum standards law. Others rejected this fear as naive. They did not think that urban kids could be stigmatized much more than they already have been. It is true that the test results may well reinforce public prejudices, but that risk is offset more than adequately by the attention which the test results will focus on urban schools. There is a note of desperation in this, to the effect that the status quo is thought to be so intolerable that any change is likely to be a change for the better.

One problem anticipated by an NJEA official was the impact of transient pupils on a school district's record. If urban districts receive large numbers of migrant children from depressed areas, in-state, out-of-state, and even out-of-country, and the previous miseducation of those children is reflected in their scores on the state tests, should that, in turn, be allowed to reflect on the quality of the receiving districts? How much time should a district have with a pupil before being held responsible for that pupil's achievement?

One respondent also hoped that compensatory education money would be tied to the socioeconomic status of children as well as to their test scores. The concern was that already advantaged pupils not be rewarded for failure to apply themselves to their schoolwork. (The State Education Department does intend to use socioeconomic indicators in the computation of compensatory aid.)

A final respondent reflection worth noting here is that the state test results may have the effect of slowing down the desegregation process. The scores of black pupils will constitute a quantitative argument with which white parents will resist desegregation.

Parents

There was no single concern that stood out in this category. The two most frequently mentioned concerns were each mentioned by only a few of the respondents. One of these was that parents, like the public at large, were too prone to think of education in comparative, competitive terms. Thus, parents will judge their children's education relative to the scores which other students within the district and across districts get on the state minimum competency tests. Those aspects of a child's education outside the minimum basic skills area will be disregarded since there will be no hard comparative data with which to make a judgment. (A separate study conducted as part of this NIE Project determined that there is no national standardized test that is used in all of New Jersey's school districts, and that the most commonly used such test - the Iowa Test of Basic Skills - is used in only about a quarter of the districts.)

This comparative judging will lead to unrealistic expectations of what schools can accomplish. This situation is worsened by the fact that the public's expectations may have already been raised unduly by the fanfare surrounding the education reform program. One outcome will likely be parental demands for evaluations of teachers based on pupil performance on the state tests.

The other most frequently mentioned concern was in the form of both an exhortation and a prediction. Parent involvement was urged as essential for the success of the state's education reform program. The encouragement for children to learn must come from the parents. The prediction, however, was that those children most in need of parental support would not get it. The more sympathetic respondents pointed out that poor parents were too overwhelmed with their own difficulties to be of much assistance in their children's education. Moreover, these parents were themselves too ill-educated to be of much help even if they tried. A less sympathetic respondent expressed his opinion of many poor parents when he said they "would rather buy a six-pack than a book", and that some of the mothers "sleep with a different guy every night and give their kids 7-Up and potato chips for breakfast."

Teachers

Absolutely no one forecast that statewide minimum standards would be a boon to

teachers. Some thought that the brunt of the responsibility and the blame for student performance on the state tests would fall upon the classroom teachers. Teachers will have more work under the new system and, depending on how rigidly that system is implemented, their academic freedom could be curtailed. They will be forced to teach to the state tests because of the public notice that will be drawn to the test results. The fact that teachers do not control all the environmental influences on pupil performance is a truth that may not evoke much public acknowledgement or sympathy, especially given the difficulty of dealing with the non-school influences on children. The test scores their pupils get will be used to evaluate teachers, either formally or informally, overtly or covertly, fairly or unfairly. The test scores could in time become a basis for teacher decertification. It is worth noting that teacher groups predicted these same consequences to ensue from the New Jersey Educational Assessment Program tests, which preceded the minimum basic skills tests. The consequences did not ensue, but teacher groups may still believe that they would have if enough time had elapsed.

The predicted teacher reaction to these cassandra prophesies is an amalgam of fear, hostility, defensiveness, and bitching. Just as none of the respondents thought that teacher self-interest would be well served by the minimum standards law, no one expected teachers to react positively to the law's implementation. One urban advocate worried that teacher hostility would be vented against pupils, and that the test scores of black pupils would only reinforce the racist stereotypes held by their white teachers. One respondent even thought that the state test results might engender a renewed public interest in a voucher system, with the attendant insecurity and competitiveness among teachers. (The New Jersey Education Association at its annual conventions has overwhelmingly rejected the voucher concept.) Again, these same fears were enunciated under the old state testing program, and again it may be felt that the fears would have proven out if the old program had not been terminated.

Some respondents thought that teachers were not seriously threatened by statewide minimum standards. The education reform law, they believe, came almost ten years too late to be a serious challenge to teacher self-determination. Chapter 303, the collective bargaining law for public employees, which was passed in 1968, has effectively insulated teachers against accountability demands. The state, having conferred power upon teachers by giving them the right to bargain collectively the terms and conditions of their employment, cannot now retrieve the rights it delegated. Without this power, the public is stuck with a servant class that can reject public control with a good deal of impunity. This is especially the case

with tenured teachers. The most the public can do to upgrade the quality of instruction from its pedagogical albatross is to finance in-service training programs, which can only guarantee the well-being of the education school consultants who conduct the programs. There may also be an effort to reduce class sizes and course loads in order to deny teachers some of the reasons they now give for the poor results they get. The upgrading of the instructional staff through attrition and replacement is not a very promising prospect given the stagnant nature of the work force and the decline in the school-age population.

If the statewide minimum standards law leads to more financial resources to low achieving districts, making the teachers' jobs easier and more fruitful, it may yet command the support of teacher groups. The fruitfulness can come in the form of gratifying success with students or additional perquisites for teachers.

Administrators

By and large, administrators are thought to be in the same boat as teachers. Statewide minimum standards will do them no good and can conceivably harm them. Their workloads will certainly be increased. On the one hand, administrators are two or more steps removed from the pupils' performance, and therefore have at least two parties other than themselves to blame for poor pupil performance, including children, parents, teachers, and special staff. But administrators are also the ones expected to represent the school or district in public confrontations over test scores.

One respondent said that the minimum standards law was "designed to fail" since administrators in low achieving districts would not get the money they needed to correct deficiencies. Other respondents indicated that administrators would "cover their asses" in their traditional style of punctilious adherence to form-filling rituals. There is also the possiblity that state aid will not be used to remediate deficient pupils but to subsidize general school programs. This aid could even be used to reduce local taxes and thus the local contribution to school funding.

Taxpayers

There was a single outstanding recommendation in this category: taxpayers had better brace themselves for the tax increases that will be necessary to support the education reform act. Test development and administration, district remediation programs, assistance from the Educational Improvement Centers, and monitoring of all this by the State Education Department should add significantly to the cost of education in New Jersey.

There is also some anticipation that taxpayers may pressure municipal officials into using state education aid as an excuse for reducing the local contribution to school support. State aid will not be "in addition to" but rather "instead of". At the state level, there may be pressure on the Legislature or the Department to withhold compensatory education money from districts that do not get results, for the putative reason that to do otherwise will be seen as a reward for failure.

Taxpayers, particularly through their formal organizations, will become more cost-benefit conscious. They too will be looking for benefits that can be measured by hard, comparative data, e.g., state test results. In brief, the list of educational priorities may not only show art and music appreciation at the bottom, the list may be shortened by eliminating these goals entirely.

State Education Department Officials

It is commonly assumed that the Department will need more staff if it is to discharge its monitoring and assistance roles effectively. (A black respondent noted bitterly that the education reform act had thus far succeeded only in creating more jobs for whites.) Some respondents suggested that the quality as well as the quantity of the Department personnel should be augmented. The further suggestion was made that one way to improve quality would be through the firing of several of the current staff who have neither the ability nor the commitment to oversee large-scale educational reform.

There was a sense that the Department was groping on a day-to-day basis, with no clear idea of where it wanted to go. There is also skepticism about the legislated presumption that Department staff are more competent educators than school district staffs. Some respondents obviously expect to see the Department fall flat on its collective face or other protuberance should it ever decide to take over the instructional responsibilities of a local district.

The expansion of the State Education Department bureaucracy will necessitate tighter forms of coordination to avoid duplication, contradiction, and a needless proliferation of decision points. This structural clarity within the Department is a sine qua non for the careful allocation and monitoring of compensatory education expenditures. The responsibility for getting the Department properly organized is, of course, assigned to the Commissioner. Beyond this, however, several respondents were of the opinion that the success of state educational reform would largely be determined by the Commissioner's commitment to the program and his ability to instill that commitment in his subordinates.

A perceived inhibition in the Commissioner's own commitment was attributed to

the way he got his job. He is an appointee of the Governor and Legislature. His retention is contingent upon their good will. They, in turn, are subject to pressure from organized groups such as the New Jersey Education Association. One state Senator lamented the nature of the Commissioner's appointment and wished that the Commissioner could afford to act more independently.

There was an interesting split among the respondents regarding the role the Department would play in the design of the state competency tests and thereby the determination of the state minimum standards. One group thought the Department would not attempt to rig the standard to produce a desired outcome. Another group thought it would. This second group was itself divided into two groups: one thought the Department should not rig the standards, and the other felt the Department had an obligation to set standards which would result in the right percentages of failing students to elicit maximum public support. This last group, which favored a kind of Department predetermination of the state standards, had among its number some ranking officials of the Department. The argument was that the Department would be remiss if it did not attempt to construct minimum standards that would produce a desirable public reaction when the test results came in. There was no point in standing on a foolish principle that would only succeed in alienating public support for educational reform. Those who disagreed said the minimum standards should mirror the minimum skills that pupils should possess, regardless of how good or bad the state's educational system would look when the test results came in. It was dishonest to make the minimum standard a political standard.

A couple of respondents thought that politically determined standards would eventually be shown for what they were when the Department of Higher Education began administering its basic skills tests to graduates of the public schools. The Department of Higher Education used to be part of the State Education Department. It has been independent for ten years now and is often at odds with the State Education Department. The feeling is that the elementary and secondary schools, under the general supervision of the State Education Department, are not doing enough to prepare young people for the colleges that are under the direction of the Department of Higher Education. Therefore, the DHE has begun a program of basic skills testing of students admitted to the colleges to see what deficiencies the colleges will have to redress. Any discrepancy between the DHE tests results and the SED results would cast suspicion on the State Education Department since the Department of Higher Education would have no vested interest to protect.

In concluding this section, we will cite the doomsayer who predicted that the future for the State Education Department under the statewide minimum standards law

would consist of a public reaction against, and dismantling of, centralized planning and testing.

Legislators

There is a general distrust of the Legislature's ability to produce educational reform, even though, according to the New Jersey Constitution, the Legislature has final responsibility for education, not the Governor, the Commissioner or local districts. This distrust is articulated most impressively by members of the Legislature, both in the Assembly and the Senate. To begin with, and most importantly, legislators have the Commissioner's problem writ larger. They are politically vulnerable and hence squeamish. Their efforts to accomodate a variety of interests cause them to draft laws in which some sections subvert other sections. A number of school superintendents have publicly stated that the Public School Education Act contains such sections, most especially the sections which limit increases in school district spending and yet impose time-consuming accountability measures. Some judges of the state Supreme Court thought the education reform act was unconstitutional because it attempted to equalize fiscal capacity across school districts for the bottom 2/3 of districts at the same time that it continued politically inspired state aid to affluent districts. One school superintendent said that the Legislature, in its haste to please urban pressure groups, passed an education reform act which unconstitutionally usurps the power of the State Board of Education. This does not appear to have occurred to the State Board.

There is concern that the Legislature is traditionally most vulnerable to the displeasure of the New Jersey Education Association, and that in a short time the Legislature will begin amending the education reform act to NJEA's liking. One thing that NJEA clearly does not like is the statewide minimum standards amendment to the act.

The legislature might also fail to exercise its oversight authority with any diligence if it appears that to do so will antagonize powerful constituent groups. Because legislators are transient, the oversight responsibility may fall to those who were not in office when the law was enacted and who would not have voted for it if they had been. Legislators are transient in another sense - their interests are fleeting. Today's political football is tomorrow's dull issue. A new Legislature might become absorbed in non-school issues and allow the education reform act to wither from inattention.

Legislators are also expected to have Solomonic wisdom, when in fact they have trouble even comprehending many of the issues with which they must deal. If they have the ability to comprehend an issue, they may not have the time in a busy legislative season. This makes them particularly susceptible to the advice they get from

the groups with the most sophisticated lobbying techniques.

One respondent predicted that the legislators will become fed up with urban issues generally, and will redraw voting districts to reduce the nettlesome urban representation in the Legislature.

None of the respondents foresaw the Legislature voting more education aid to districts which have high percentages of failing students on the minimum competency tests. In fact, just the opposite was predicted - that the Legislature might vote to withdraw aid from districts with a large proportion of low achieving pupils. In this way it can avoid being accused of wastefulness and at the same time claim that it has demonstrated a get-tough attitude for the benefit of children. The Legislature might also demand stricter procedures for the evaluation and continuation of teachers. In short, several respondents thought the Legislature, given a choice, would opt to blame the professional education community rather than acknowledge its own parsimoniousness as a cause of educational failure in New Jersey.

Again, it is true that many of these conditions existed under the old state testing program, and the Legislature did not withdraw aid when the test results showed that some districts were doing poorly. However, that testing program was not required by state law, and it did not attempt to measure <u>minimum</u> basic skills but rather general progress in math and reading.

QUESTION 11: IF IT IS FOUND THAT A CONSIDERABLE PROPORTION OF NEW JERSEY STUDENTS ARE BELOW THE MINIMUM STANDARDS, AND QUITE FAR BELOW, WHAT ACTION DO YOU THINK THIS WOULD CALL FOR?

On this question, legislators and officials of the State Education Department seem to be agreed on the necessity for precluding the problem by setting the standards in a way that would predetermine the outcome. One legislator said that the only reasonable way to proceed was backwards. That is, first find out how much money would be available for remediation and what the average amount should be for each remedial pupil, then divide that amount into the total to get the number of pupils the state can remediate, and lastly, set a percentile minimum standard that will generate only that number of failing pupils. To do otherwise, he suggested, is to risk generating more failing pupils than the state is prepared to remediate with reasonable resources and to engender in many of these pupils and enduring sense of failure.

Others who advocated a rigged standard argued that it should generate just the right per cent of failing pupils so as to be considered neither naively high nor ludicrously low. One person put this at 25% statewide. Another person put it at 33% in the poorest districts. (It may well be that both these per cents could be realized with the same standard.)

Those who argued for setting the standards on what it is honestly thought kids should know, regardless of the political or financial consequences, nevertheless expected that the standards would be set for optimum political and financial impact. However, they insisted that the political and financial implications were properly the problems of the legislators and not the standard setting committees or the State Education Department. One of these people asked the interviewer with a pained expression, "Why bother setting standards at all if you already know what the results will be?"

Among those who entertained the assumption of the question - that a considerable proportion of New Jersey students would test below the minimum standards - the action that was most often recommended was simply a greater emphasis on basic skills. The "frills" would be omitted as schools got back to basics. Not only would schools be stressing the basic skills, they would be emphasizing the minimum competencies in those skill areas. The "basic" education of gifted students would definitely get a lower priority. Resources would be reallocated toward the remediation of students who were below the minimum standards.

Here again, none of the legislators recommended that local districts with poor test scores get more state money. One legislator specifically recommended that these districts get less state money. Nor did any officials of the State Education Department suggest that there would be a case for additional state financial aid to the low achieving districts. One official expressly rejected the notion that the Department itself would have a legal obligation to render technical assistance. The burden, he thought, was on the local districts. This view was repudiated by two respondents who noted that the law spelled out a series of intervention steps by the State Education Department for districts that were unable to get satisfactory results on their own.

Other respondents, mostly from the professional education organizations, did say that the state should provide more money to local districts for remediation programs. One of these respondents recommended that the state take over all the remediation costs, since the amount it now supplies still necessitates local augmentation. Another respondent said the state should pay for all of the basic skills education in New Jersey public schools, with local districts financing only the "frills" they choose to have.

As to the specific uses to which additional state aid might be put, there was only one respondent who suggested anything. He proposed smaller classes and more teacher aides.

There were many hortatory recommendations proffered by the respondents. "Take a hard look." "Just teach well." "Redouble our efforts." "District-by-district

analysis." "Better cooperation among parents and teachers and administrators." These have a McGuffey Reader ring to them, which is not entirely inappropriate given the context.

One respondent with a broad perspective prefaced his recommendation with some predictions. He said that if the test results statewide were distressing, there would be two major scapegoats: students and teachers. The first would suffer from a resurgence of Jensenism and environmental determinism. The public reaction would be a plaintive "Well, what can one expect of students like that?" Regarding teachers, there would be a demand for certification and tenure changes, making it more difficult to get into the teaching profession and easier to be put out.

The recommendation of this person is contained in the following quote: "Barring socialism, it may not be possible to solve the problem." It was a recommendation faintly echoed by a school superintendent who said that poor test results should prompt urbanites to lobby for broad social services as well as education aid.

In conclusion, one legislator answered the question of what should (or would) happen if the test results were disastrous by replying brusquely, "The law would be repealed!"

QUESTION 12: WHAT IS YOUR OPINION OF HAVING STATEWIDE MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION?

(The statewide minimum standards law does not mandate high school graduation requirements. Nevertheless, at the time the law was signed by the governor, he expressed a desire to have the feasibility of graduation requirements examined. A state committee was created for this purpose and has been working parallel to the state standards committees. Its report does not recommend state administered testing but only an expansion of state required courses with local assessment. A bill has recently been introduced in the State Senate, however, which would require state testing.)

The two words which were most often used in response to this question were "punitive" and "remediation". If the graduation requirements were administered at the last moment, without time for remediation, the student could be penalized for the faults of the system. For this reason, many of the respondents wished either to have the statewide minimum standards testing in basic skills, with its consequent remediation, serve as a kind of high school graduation requirement, or else they wished to await experience with the minimum basic skills program before deciding on the necessity for graduation requirements.

Those who thought that specific graduation requirements were already in order did so for a couple of reasons: (1) the time was politically ripe for the adoption

of such requirements, and (2) high school diplomas have ceased to have any denotative value. However, most of these people too were concerned that the requirements be administered long enough before anticipated graduation to permit remediation of unsatisfactory performance. Only two people did not share this concern. One thought that kids would be sufficiently motivated to pass the tests even at the last moment. The other thought that kids "just had to roll up their sleeves and start working." Rather than substituting the minimum basic skills program for graduation requirements, this second person was prepared to do the opposite, that is, let there just be a high school graduation requirement which kids would soon realize they had to pass or else no diploma.

Two members of the Legislature who were intimately involved in the drafting of the education reform act advised against statewide graduation requirements. They believed that local districts could best determine the life needs of their pupils. One said that kids were not like loaves of bread that should come out of the school system with identical qualities. He also warned against the erosion of local initiative that would result from the further centralization of authority through statewide graduation requirements.

Finally, an urban school superintendent and a high official of the State Education Department were fearful that overly stringent graduation requirements would compel some students to drop out of school who would otherwise have remained to reap the benefits of additional education.

Conclusion

Educational reform in New Jersey, as elsewhere, has been opposed by those on whom the brunt of the reform must fall - educators. The group that is being reformed - be it educators, doctors, lawyers, insurance salesmen - is the group which is most offended by and most resists reform. On the other hand, the admonition of "Physician, heal thyself" does not always produce the results the public wants or as quickly as the public wishes. The anomalous situation that arises is that the public ends up ordering reform, but the reform itself can only be effected by those found in need of reform. It is too much to expect the losing party to forego dilatoriness and vacillation and subversion in implementing that which it perceives to be inimical to its own interests.

In ordering the reform, the public is too prone to think of the wish as father to the act. The public may not be willing to stay with the issue through the implementation phase. The media may divert the public's attention to the next big news item, so that today's reform becomes not only od but passe' - no longer an engaging topic of conversation at cocktail parties. In a short while, the past that was to be reformed reasserts itself. It may even do so with the fanfare of a counterreformation.

The public, whose attention span is short to begin with, may lose interest even more quickly when it begins to realize the intractability of the problem it had so blithely expected to legislate out of existence. This is especially true of educational reform, where good intentions are so difficult to translate into effective practice. If the public does not get discouraged when confronted with the complexity of the issue, it may attempt to oversimplify the issue by seeking villains, i.e., educators. To face the facts forthrightly means an acknowledgement of one's own complicity in the educational failures of the society. It involves taking some responsibility for the non-school impediments which prevent the poor and oppressed from succeeding in school.

APPENDIX

PURPOSE AND PROCEDURE OF INTERVIEWS

PURPOSE

To interview the major figures who have been involved in this issue, in order to understand how and why New Jersey arrived at the present legislation regarding statewide minimum standards.

PROCEDURE

(1) "Consent for Interview" form.

Prior to the interview you will be mailed a "Consent for Interview" form, a Rutgers University requirement resulting from the national concern for privacy and designed to protect unwitting subjects on sensitive issues. It will enable you to give your written permission for the interview and will apprise you of the protections afforded your interview responses. For your convenience, the form will be picked up by the interviewer at the interview, so that you will not have to mail it back.

(2) Time required.

The interview should take approximately thirty minutes to one hour.

(3) Recording procedure.

The interview will be recorded by hand, since the project budget does not allow for tape recording.

(4) Questions.

The questions on the enclosed list will be discussed with each of the interviewees.

CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW

I, the undersigned, consent to be interviewed as part of the study of statewide minimum standards being conducted at Rutgers University under a grant from the National Institute of Education. The questions will be concerned with the process and reasons by which the law on minimum standards was advocated or opposed.

I understand that my signature on this document simply consents to the interview, and that unless I give a separate consent in writing I will not be named in the research report nor described in any way which would reveal my identity. My interview results will be kept secure from the attention of anyone but the research team itself unless I give this separate consent in writing.

I further understand that I may withdraw my consents at any time I wish before they have been acted upon.

_____
(signature)

_____
(date)

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Statewide minimum standards has been an issue in New Jersey for more than a year. Would you classify yourself as a consistent advocate or opponent of minimum standards or have your views changed during this period?
2. By what groups or individuals were you advised in the formulation of your opinion on this issue?
3. If your views changed during this period which groups or individuals were most influential in changing your views? How and why?
4. What steps did you or your organization take to facilitate (prevent) the passage of the minimum standards law?
5. What groups or individuals were most effective in assisting you in your efforts efforts?
6. What did each of them do?
7. What factors or forces do you think account for the passage of the law?
8. To what extent does the law meet your goals (or concerns) regarding minimum standards?
9. How do you feel about the way the law is being implemented?
10. What kinds of problems do you foresee in the future, regarding the implementation of the new law, from the point of view of children, parents, teachers, administrators, taxpayers, State Education Department officials or legislators?
11. If it is found that a considerable proportion of New Jersey students are below the minimum standards, and quite far below, what action do you think this would call for?
12. What is your opinion of having statewide minimum requirements for high school graduation?
13. (Where appropriate) May we arrange to get copies of your organization's literature on statewide minimum competencies?